

Six

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Assessing reading with the ESL Scales

This case study documents the process by which staff at Matraville Public School developed an integrated assessment policy (K–6) using the Reading and Responding strand of the ESL Scales as the standard framework. To date, the assessment policy relates only to the early years but it is planned that a Years 3–6 policy will be developed. Also planned is an oral language assessment policy based on the Oral Interaction strand of the ESL Scales. Sample formats from the school assessment policy are included for use as models in discussion with your own staff.



Appendices

- 6.1 The Assessment Process
- 6.2 Assessing using the ESL Scales
- 6.3 Student Progress - Reading and Responding
- 6.4 (a) Anecdotal Record
- 6.4 (b) Running Record
- 6.5 Check List
- 6.6 Analysis of Data: Student Tracking Sheet

Context

Matraville Public School is located in the Bondi District of Sydney. It has a population of 365 students, 90 percent of whom are from non-English speaking backgrounds. There are 13 class teachers, five ESL teachers in three full-time ESL positions, 0.5 Reading Recovery teacher, one STLA teacher, 0.8 Librarian and one Spanish Community Language teacher.

In 1996 the ESL teachers attended the 'ESL Scales: Implications for Teaching and Learning' professional development course and undertook to implement the ESL Scales at school level during 1997, beginning with a single class. For many years the staff had questioned the use of the English syllabus in assessing such a large NESB population and also the New Arrival first phase students.

The staff had expressed a need to develop a relevant assessment policy to cater for the needs of the ESL students. Such a policy was needed to provide a shared framework for observing, communicating and reporting ESL student achievement across the curriculum to teachers and parents.

This action research report records the steps involved in the implementation of the ESL Scales at the school and the formulation of a school assessment policy for Years K-3, based on the Reading and Responding strand.

The process

1. **Raising Awareness** - staff were to become familiar with the components of the ESL Scales and aware of their relevance for teaching and learning across the key learning areas (KLAs).
2. **Planning Implementation** - this stage involved collaboration between the Assistant Principal, Infants (teaching a Year 2 class) and myself writing up an assessment policy. We needed to consider what to teach, how to teach it, a developmental sequence of teaching/learning strategies and the period of time needed to achieve outcomes.
3. **Early Implementation** - all staff were to formulate assessment tasks and teacher assessment and recording strategies from Reading and Responding Level B1 to Level 5.
4. **Full Implementation** - K-3 staff would assess and record ESL student achievement using the assessment tasks and recording strategies.
5. **Adaptation** - K-3 staff would then use the data collected to report to other teachers and parents by the end of the year.

1. Raising Awareness

All staff members were aware of the existence of the ESL Scales but needed further explanation on how to record the progress of students learning English as a second language.

The district ESL consultant was invited to a staff meeting to brief the staff on the ESL Scales. In total, four staff meetings and a Staff Development Day were used to in-service the staff on the ESL Scales.

2. Planning Implementation

We were eager to solve the initial problem of assessing and recording ESL student achievement. It was imperative that assessment activities were both valid and reliable. If this was achieved then a professional 'on-balance' judgment of pupil achievement could be made.

We agreed that once an assessment policy for ESL learners was developed, then an appropriate reporting system to parents could be generated. The Assistant Principal, Infants and I decided on an assessment process as our plan of action (**Appendix 6.1**).

The first problem encountered was how to collect and record data. We attempted to solve this by drawing up a proforma which contained all relevant information for teachers to use, i.e. level, outcome, pointers, class/group/individual activity, student assessment task, teacher assessment strategy and teacher recording strategy. The appropriate recording sheets, i.e. Anecdotal Record sheets/Reading Conference sheets/Checklists, were to be attached to each student assessment proforma.

With these proformas completed, together with the recording sheets, the collection and recording of data would follow.

3. Early Implementation

We distributed a timeline to staff during a staff meeting. It became evident that the staff required a clear and simple overview of the plan of action, such as:

- WHY teachers were going to use the ESL Scales in assessing student outcomes
- WHAT teachers were going to assess
- HOW teachers were going to assess and incorporate this data into their class programs
- WHEN this assessment was going to take place.

We realised that the answers to these questions needed to be clearly explained in the assessment policy. The flowchart (**Appendix 6.2**) became useful in explaining this process.

Staff were divided into groups, e.g. two Kindergarten teachers and an ESL teacher, two Year 1 teachers and the Reading Recovery teacher. Each group was to work on a level in the Reading and Responding strand, for example:

Kindergarten Level B1
Year 1 Level B2
Year 2 Level B3 and Level 1
Year 3 Level 2
Year 4 Level 3
Year 5 Level 4
Year 6 Level 5

For developing assessment tasks and recording strategies for each designated level, we explained that in order to collect, analyse and record information about student progress teachers must consider designing an appropriate teaching/learning program. The suggested proforma for documenting tasks and strategies for Level 2 illustrate this process (**Appendix 6.3**). Teachers were reminded that assessment tasks were to be based on class programs, so as to ensure they were not a 'one off' test which would not give a clear indication of student achievement.

To make the assessment process as uniform as possible, staff were asked to draw up the appropriate standard recording sheets for each strand organiser (**Appendices 6.4 and 6.5**).

At the final stage of assessment all recorded data would be transferred to a standard checklist (**Appendix 6.6**). Outcomes achieved were then to be recorded on a pupil tracking sheet (**Appendix 6.7**).

When staff returned after six weeks of working collaboratively in their groups several problems were raised in understanding the ESL Scales, as well as the following:

1. The initial plan of implementing the ESL Scales across K-6, by the end of 1997, was too ambitious. We decided to concentrate on a document for K-2, as we were both working with infants grades.
2. Several teachers expressed concerns about assessing ESL learners within their reading groups as impossible without the help of a support teacher (Years 4-6 are split into reading groups three mornings a week for 45 minutes. Support staff as well as class teachers are required to take groups.)
3. Not all ESL Scales levels were completed, which also made it impossible to complete the document across K-6.

Conclusion

Throughout the planning and early implementation stages we had attempted to put together a cohesive Assessment Policy K-6 package, which would incorporate the assessment of student outcomes using the ESL Scales. This action research project has led to a situation where we are now focusing our efforts on grades K-2 only, with a view to developing a Years 3-6 package at a later stage.

Before the project, the ESL Scales had only been used by ESL teachers at the school and had not been formally incorporated into a whole school assessment policy. The staff were aware of their existence but were unsure of how they could be absorbed into classroom practice.

It was perhaps a good beginning, but it also meant that we were starting from 'scratch'. From the onset we wanted to produce a document that could be picked up and used by class and support teachers. The document needed to include: how teachers were to identify and track progress and outcomes in English; how teachers were to document and record their observations; and how teachers could share this information with other colleagues.

At this stage, I feel satisfied that we have achieved the following as a result of participating in the action research:

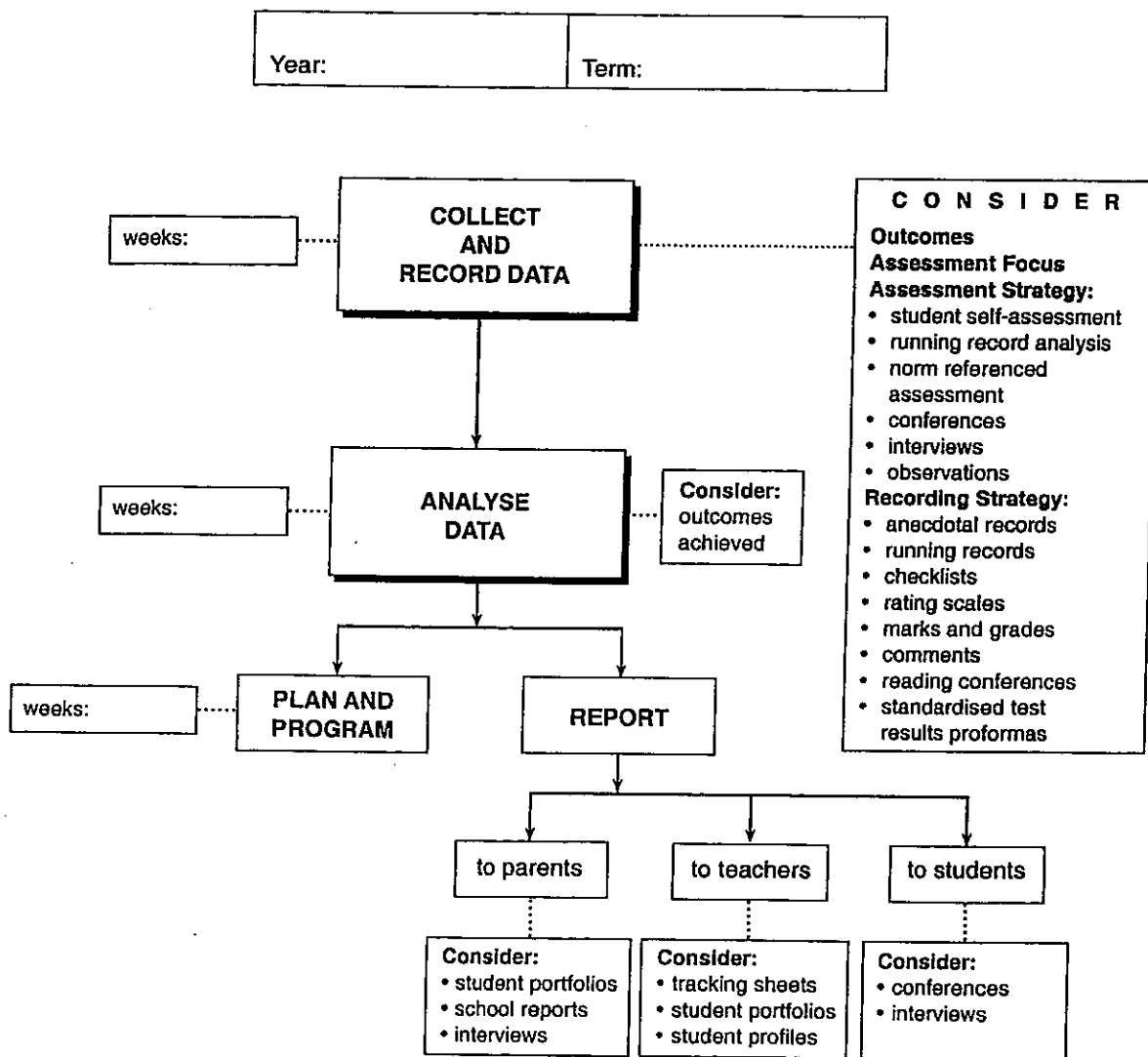
1. Matraville Public School now has a fair and valid K–3 Reading Assessment Policy, based on the Reading and Responding strand of the ESL Scales. The policy incorporates effective and informative assessment practices.
2. Teachers can be confident in making judgments, on the weight of assessment evidence, about student progress towards the achievement of outcomes.
3. When staff members collect and record assessment data on ESL learners, they are able to use this information to plan and program appropriate teaching/learning activities, and report to other teachers and parents on student achievement and progress.
4. As the English syllabus is used to assess the achievement of native English speakers at the school, the ESL Scales will be used in conjunction with the English syllabus to assess ESL learners' knowledge, skills and understanding across all key learning areas.
5. All members of staff are now more familiar with the ESL Scales.
6. The whole staff has been involved in the development of the assessment policy, with support from the beginning by the principal.

Future direction

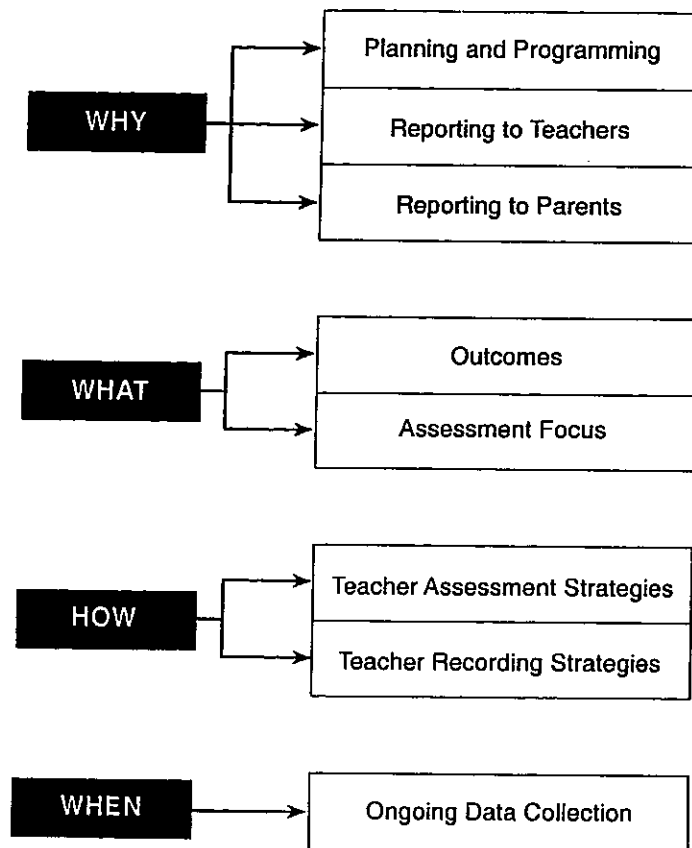
There is still work to be done, with the last two stages yet to be addressed. I feel confident that with continued support, this will be achieved. It is anticipated that assessment practices in the Oral Interaction strand will be developed during 1998.

I would like to thank our Assistant Principal, Infants, Ms Diane Harvey, for her direction, enthusiasm, support and contribution towards this action research study.

THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS



ASSESSING USING THE ESL SCALES



STEPS FOR ASSESSING		
1. Collect and record data	2. Analyse data – outcomes achieved	3. Report on data

RUNNING RECORD READING AND RESPONDING: LEVEL 2

2.7 Language Structures and Features

Reads texts using knowledge of basic conventions of print, a developing sight and oral vocabulary and a developing knowledge of structures of English.

Date: _____		
Name: _____		
Age: _____	Book level: _____	Score: _____
Error Rate: _____	Accuracy: _____	Self corrections: _____

M Meaning/semantic processing	S Structure/grammatical processing	V Visual/graphophonic processing	P Sound/phonological processing		
Title			Errors	S/C	Cues

CHECKLIST

READING AND RESPONDING: LEVEL 2

2.6 Language and Cultural Understanding

Shows understanding of the differences between narrative and expository texts which relate to own knowledge and experience.

LEGEND

A	Identify the difference between factual and fictional books.
B	Understand and use some of the terminology of reading.
C	Show awareness that stories are generally read for enjoyment and that non narrative texts are read for information.
D	Distinguish between narrative and non-narrative texts.

[illegible]

ANALYSIS OF DATA — STUDENT TRACKING SHEET

[illegible]